

## Post-Traumatic Growth: Lessons from Historical Figures on Resilience and Transformation

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### ABSTRACT

The difficulties that human beings face today range from pandemics to threats to their well-being, such as violence, abuse, and loss. These incidents can leave a profound impact on individuals and their communities. This paper explores Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) in the context of the narratives of Rama, Arjuna, Gautam Buddha, Chandra Gupta Maurya, and Mahatma Gandhi highlighting the roles of social support and self-efficacy. This exciting integration of history with psychology studies PTG through the lives of historical figures. PTG is defined as positive psychological change experienced through tremendous adversity. Story analysis reveals how such figures managed anxiety, stress, or trauma and translated it into deep personal development. The growth of self-efficacy in overcoming obstacles and social support networks are two important themes here. These historical narratives continue to provide timeless lessons in resilience and transformation, offering solutions to the contemporary global challenges. By studying such cases, individuals and communities can learn how to overcome adversity and achieve progress.

**Keywords:** *Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), Narrative Study, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, Resilience, Psychological Transformation, Historical Figures*

In the modern world, people go through endless challenges, most of which may raise traumatizing events. It spans from a global pandemic to natural calamities, and finally, on a personal level, violence, abuse, or loss, among other events that may lead to trauma. Such incidences may shake our feelings of being safe and secure, bringing powerful emotions of fear, anxiety, and sorrow. Trauma is emotionally and psychologically costly as it is very debilitating, leaving one isolated, helpless, and hopeless (Grossman et al., 2021; Kleber, 2019; Hartley et al., 2016).

However, the human spirit remains a great source of survival and growth, even when pitched against adversities. The current paper unveils the phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (PTG) in which an individual overcomes their adversities to come out more robustly with a greater understanding not only about themselves but also about the environment around them. In PTG, it is not a return to the original state but the possibility of profound positive change, a kind of transformation created in the crucible of suffering (Tedeschi & Calhoun,

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2004). It was first introduced by Tedeschi and Calhoun in the 1990s. PTG is manifested in more profound and meaningful interpersonal relationships, increased appreciation for life, personal strength, changed priorities, and a more prosperous existential and spiritual life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

This paper describes PTG through the narratives of five historical figures: Rama, Arjuna, Gautam Buddha, Chandra Gupta Maurya, and Mahatma Gandhi. Each of them had to face extraordinary adversity and emerge from it with a transformation in life purpose and an understanding of the human condition. By studying their paths, we are interested in highlighting the importance of social support and self-efficacy in building resilience and psychological transformation, even in the face of contemporary global challenges.

This paper is organized as follows: First, we discuss the applied methodology in this research, namely narrative analysis and the reasons for its choice. Second, we present in detail the narratives of the five historical figures, focusing on their experiences of trauma and subsequent growth. This is followed by a discussion of two critical themes: social support and self-efficacy. A literature background is provided on these two themes and how they relate to the historical narratives. Finally, we turn to applying PTG principles within the context of contemporary life and consider ways in which PTG can be supported for individuals and communities today.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses narrative analysis as a qualitative research approach to explore the stories of specific historical figures. Investigating lives and experiences based on narratives about selected famous personalities was chosen as a research method due to its capacity to reveal psychological changes in each individual's life through personal stories. This approach is about going through texts and historical records that narrate the lives and experiences of such people, with a view to identifying major events which resulted in notable psychological changes, roles played by social support systems and self-efficacy enhancement.

For instance, various sources that included religious texts, historical documents, academic papers, and autobiographies were scrutinized. The study also incorporates comparative analysis to draw parallels between the experiences of these figures and contemporary theories of PTG.

#### ***Historical Figures and Their Narratives***

##### **Rama**

Rama, the beloved prince of Ayodhya, exemplifies duty, perseverance, and moral integrity. As the eldest son of King Dasharatha and Queen Kaushalya, Rama's early life was characterized by prosperity and joy. However, his spiritual growth culminating in kingship was greatly impacted by several difficulties (Valmiki, trans. 1989).

In his youth, Rama was designated as the future king of Ayodhya. Nevertheless, due to Kaikeyi's manipulations, Dasharatha was compelled to exile Rama for fourteen years. This period of exile, known as Vanavasa, represented a profound moment of crisis and loss in Rama. Nonetheless, he accepted it willingly to keep his father's promise and dharma honor intact (V.R.2).

Accompanied by his devoted wife Sita and loyal brother Lakshmana, Rama embarked on a journey into the forest. During their exile, they encountered various challenges, including

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battles with demons and tests of their resolve. The abduction of Sita by the demon king Ravana was particularly distressing, putting Rama's faith, courage, and determination to the test (V.R.3).

In the face of adversity, Rama exhibited unwavering fortitude and commitment to dharma. He enlisted an army of allies, such as the monkey warrior Hanuman, to locate Sita and confront Ravana (Valmiki, trans. 1989). Throughout these trials, the social support network consisting of his wife, brother, and newfound allies played a critical role in bolstering his resilience and emotional strength. Rama's capacity to inspire loyalty and trust among his companions reflects his exceptional emotional intelligence and empathy.

Rama's self-efficacy, or his belief in his ability to influence events and outcomes, was reinforced by his journey. Despite facing numerous challenges, Rama never doubted his purpose or ability to surmount obstacles. The period of exile and subsequent war provided him with important insights into compassion, leadership, and the complexities of human emotions, thereby deepening his understanding of dharma and responsibilities of kingship (Valmiki, trans. 1989).

When we consider post-traumatic growth, Rama's story shows us that when someone faces and conquers their problems, they not only lead to spiritual growth but also strengthen one's character, making them more resilient. His commitment to doing what is right no matter what and his grace and wisdom in the face of adversity suggests that extremely challenging moments might spark an enlightenment process, leading individuals to acquire inner might.

### **Arjuna**

In the Mahabharata, Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, experienced his most critical turning point on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. He found himself paralyzed by doubt and moral confusion at the thought of taking up arms against his own kin. He said, "My whole body shudders; my hair is standing on end. My bow, the Gandiv, is slipping from my hand, and my skin is burning all over. My mind is in a quandary and whirling in confusion; I am unable to hold myself steady any longer. O Krishna, killer of the Keshi demon, I only see omens of misfortune. I do not foresee how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle" (B.G.1.29-31).

Seeing this inner turmoil, his charioteer and divine guide, Krishna, recognized the depth of his sorrow and encouraged Arjuna to rise above his confusion, leading him to the path of clarity and resolve. This conversation with Lord Krishna, described in the Bhagavad Gita, was transformative, turning Arjuna's despair into determination. Arjuna said, "O Infallible One, by Your grace my illusion has been dispelled, and I am situated in knowledge. I am now free from doubts, and I shall act according to Your instructions" (B.G.18.73).

Krishna's advice and Arjuna's understanding of his duty reflect the importance of support, guidance, and a positive attitude in overcoming trauma. The transformation of Arjuna from being confused about what action to take into certainty demonstrates how self-efficacy builds up with help from social support.

### **Gautam Buddha**

Gautam Buddha's transformative moment arose when he encountered the Four Sights—an elderly man, a sick man, a corpse, and a holy man. This experience changed things for him radically such that he gave up his royal existence for questing after wisdom. Asceticism and

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meditation were his lifestyles for years until he became enlightened beneath the Bodhi tree (Waddell, 1894; Silk, 2003). His PTG is characterized by the development of deep compassion and wisdom, culminating in the establishment of Buddhist teachings that emphasize the alleviation of suffering (Batchelor, 2015).

Buddha's transformation from prince to enlightened teacher exemplifies the strength of self-efficacy and the importance of communal support. Reflecting on his own experience, Buddha stressed, "By oneself indeed is evil done and by oneself is one defiled; by oneself is evil not done and by oneself is one purified. Purity and impurity depend entirely on oneself; no one can purify another" (Dhammapada, Verse 165), to signify the significance of personal struggle to attain spiritual awakening.

Furthermore, Buddha's teachings emphasize the critical role of community. He stated, "A generous heart, kind speech, and a life of service and compassion are the things which renew humanity" (Itivuttaka 1.27). The significance of the Sangha, his early followers' community, is emphasized in this in the practice and propagation of his teachings. In his transformation, the Buddha showed a course in resilience and development, giving eternal instructions about how personal effort and community encouragement can be used to conquer difficulties of life.

### **Chandra Gupta Maurya**

Chandragupta Maurya's significant turning point was meeting Chanakya, a brilliant strategist and teacher. Born into a humble background, Chandragupta faced many difficulties, such as death threats and political instability (Boesche, 2002). Chanakya's mentorship and guidance played a significant role in enhancing Chandragupta's self-efficacy and leadership skills. Chanakya, who was one of the pioneering exponents of political realism, taught the ruler called Chandragupta some very important lessons about strategy, governance, and resilience. He advised, "He who is prepared for the future and he who deals cleverly with any situation that may arise are both happy; but the fatalistic man who wholly depends on luck is ruined" (Chanakya Neeti).

Chanakya taught Chandragupta military tactics so that he could become brave enough to fight against strong rulers in society; with this knowledge at hand they managed to defeat Nandas forming Mauryan Empire that later expanded to almost all parts in India (Modelski, 1964; Boesche, 2002).

Their partnership demonstrates the life-changing importance of mentorship and social support in effecting profound personal and political change. Through Chanakya's mentorship, Chandragupta received moral encouragement and strategic reasoning, which saw him through hard times. This narrative underscores the importance of mentorship and social support in achieving post-traumatic growth (PTG) and illustrates how guidance, combined with self-efficacy and strategic thinking, can lead to remarkable achievements despite formidable challenges.

### **Mahatma Gandhi**

Mahatma Gandhi's pivotal moment occurred when he was thrown off a train in South Africa due to racial discrimination. This event sparked a process of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) that is still evident in his philosophy of nonviolent resistance (Satyagraha), commitment to social justice, and ability to inspire and mobilize millions. Gandhi's resilience was fortified by his strong sense of purpose and the support of his followers. His strong faith in

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democracy went beyond just political autonomy in the sense that it encompassed non-violence and genuine collaboration. As he famously stated, “The spirit of democracy cannot be imposed from without; it has to come from within” (Gandhi, 1927).

He dreamed of an integrity-based world federation characterized by mutual respect, where it is important to advocate for cultural exchange while still preserving one's identity. He expressed this vision eloquently: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed; I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible; but I refuse to be blown off my feet by any” (Gandhi, 1927).

Gandhi's leadership during major events such as the Salt March and India's independence struggle was inspired by these inherent values, exemplifying his profound self-efficacy and the critical importance of a supportive community.

### **THEMES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SELF-EFFICACY**

#### *Social Support*

Social support is an important component of overall well-being and stress resilience, especially while dealing with trauma. Social support is classified into four types: emotional support (e.g., empathy, love, trust), instrumental support (concrete aid), informational support (advice, recommendations), and appraisal support (e.g., constructive feedback) (Taylor, 2012). Empirical evidence points out that social support is necessary for psychological well-being; it cushions stress and stimulates mental well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Siedlecki et al., 2013; Uchino et al., 2016). Social support plays a role in PTG to help the individual process trauma, find meaning, and foster resilience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Each of the historical figures discussed in this paper had massive and solid social support networks that were helpful in their being resilient and going through psychological transformations. For instance, Rama had his loyal companions, Arjuna had Krishna, Buddha had his followers, Chandra Gupta had Chanakya, and Gandhi had the support of the Indian masses. These support systems gave them emotional nourishment, practical help, and a sense of community that was essential for their processes to PTG.

#### *Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy was introduced by Albert Bandura in 1977 as a belief in one's capability to perform the behaviors required to produce results. It is pivotal in the management of motivation, behavior, and the social atmosphere. Higher self-efficacy is linked to greater tolerance of stress, better coping skills, and better psychological well-being. Highly efficacious individuals tend to consider difficult tasks as challenges, quickly recover from setbacks, and remain positive (Bandura, 1997).

The historical figures, whose lives and actions are examined in this paper, exhibit a remarkable degree of self-efficacy, which played a crucial role in their transformative journeys. Specifically, Rama's steadfast dedication to dharma and leadership during his exile and battle against Ravana, Arjuna's shift in perspective brought about by Lord Krishna's teachings, the Buddha's emphasis on spiritual growth, Chandra Gupta's rise under the guidance of Chanakya, and Gandhi's unwavering commitment to nonviolence all demonstrate the development of self-efficacy in the face of challenges and adversity.

## LESSONS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

### *Application to Modern Contexts*

The narratives of these historical figures offer valuable lessons for contemporary society. These figures faced significant adversities and emerged stronger, demonstrating the principles of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). In an era marked by global crises, social unrest, and personal struggles, the principles of PTG can inspire individuals and communities to find meaning in adversity, foster resilience, and achieve psychological transformation (Taku et al., 2021; Holter et al., 2022; Dhillon, 2023). Through studying their personal narratives, we can devise means of dealing with contemporary problems and improving our psychological firmness.

### *Strategies for Fostering PTG*

To cultivate PTG, individuals and communities can:

- Encourage narrative sharing to process trauma and find meaning.
- Develop strong social support networks.
- Promote practices that enhance self-efficacy, such as goal-setting and mentorship programs.
- Foster environments that allow for emotional expression and regulation.

## CONCLUSION

The stories of Rama, Arjuna, Gautam Buddha, Chandra Gupta Maurya, and Mahatma Gandhi highlight the transformative potential of adversity. Through the lenses of social support and self-efficacy, these narratives provide timeless lessons on resilience and personal growth. By understanding and applying these principles, we can navigate contemporary challenges with greater strength and insight, paving the way for collective well-being and development.

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